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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the creation and evolution of "Canadiana," the national bibliography of Canada. Highlights include: (1) the need for national bibliographic services; (2) the comprehensive scope of Canada's national bibliography, which includes works about Canada and foreign-published items written by Canadians in addition to titles published in Canada; (3) the challenges of keeping the bibliography up-to-date; (4) a comparison of the first and last issues of "Canadiana," illustrating its growth; (5) the recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services related to coverage, presentation, timeliness, legal deposit, and international standards; and (6) accomplishments and current challenges. (MES)

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The Canadian National Bibliography: 50 years of continuity and change

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It is a pleasure for me to be here today to share with you the celebration of the 50th anniversary of *Canadiana*, Canada's national bibliography. I speak on behalf of all of my colleagues at the National Library of Canada in saying we are proud of our bibliographic heritage and it is an honour for me to be the person having this opportunity to tell you about the creation and evolution of our national bibliography and some of our hopes for its future.

The theme of our session today asks a question: Is bibliography indispensable or redundant? Certainly, in the early days of Canada's history, there was no question as to the need for bibliographic services. Our first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, identified the need for a national library not long after the country was created in 1867. Throughout the decades of the first half of the 20th century, librarians and researchers repeatedly lobbied the Government of Canada to provide two essential services: bibliographic control of Canadian publications and identification and location of these resources for loan. Given the other more pressing priorities in the years immediately following the second world war, it is a tribute to the government of the day that it approved the creation in 1950 of the Canadian Bibliographic Centre to compile and publish a national bibliography and to create and maintain a national union catalogue.

Dr. Jean Lunn, the first editor of Canada's national bibliography, once described the accomplishments of the team assembled to start the Centre as "the work of well intentioned amateurs". "Well intentioned," yes. Stories abound of Jean Lunn and her colleagues pitching in and doing whatever needed to be done to get each issue out in time -- "team work" before the adage existed. "Amateurs", however, they were not. Even a cursory glance at the first issues of

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Canadiana shows it to be the enterprise of visionary professionals in terms of coverage, currency and standards.

From the beginning, the scope of Canada's national bibliography was seen as being broader than a register of national imprints. The new bibliography's subtitle, *A List of publications of Canadian interest*, opened coverage to include works about Canada and foreign-published items written by Canadians in addition to titles published in Canada. Anticipating the need for bibliographic control of non-trade publications, the first issue of *Canadiana* includes listings of both federal and provincial government publications and hard-to-find titles issued by associations, societies, councils and similar bodies, often for limited distribution. This initial striving for comprehensiveness in Canadiana has remained constant over *Canadiana*'s history.

Anyone anywhere in the world who's ever worked on producing a national bibliography knows full well the challenges of being as up-to-date as possible. The "well intentioned amateurs" were no slouches when it came to the currency of *Canadiana*'s entries. The first issue contains a good number of 1951 imprints – an impressive accomplishment given the year was only a few weeks old when the first issue of the new national bibliography was sent to the printer. Detailed notes in the catalogue entries reveal the Centre's staff managed to get many of the titles hot off the press – for example, the abstract of papers presented at the inaugural meeting of Canadian Association of Microbiologists (June 7 and 8, 1951) was listed just three weeks later in the July 1st issue and the first issue of the *Weekend Picture Magazine* (September 8, 1951) appeared within days in the September 15th issue of *Canadiana*.

If subscription statistics are any measure, they point to the indispensable nature of this national bibliography -- the world seems to have been ready and waiting for the fledgling *Canadiana*. In May of 1951, just a couple of months after the first issue was released, 420 Canadian libraries and 52 libraries in the United States were on the mailing list. The distribution figures are impressive and worth noting at this year's IFLA conference where the theme is "Libraries and Librarians: Making a difference in the Knowledge Age". It's perhaps a stretch to include the early 1950s as part of the Knowledge Age but there is no question that Jean Lunn and her colleagues did make a difference. The compilation and publication of the national bibliography was the first activity that enabled the newly created Canadian Bibliographic Centre to be of direct assistance to libraries across Canada and to those external to our borders.

A good sense of the remarkable growth of *Canadiana* can be had by comparing its first and last annual printed format cumulations. When the first annual cumulation of the bibliography made its appearance in 1953, it was delivered as one volume containing 269 pages of bibliographic entries and 40 pages of indexing. The 1987 cumulation, in contrast, was published in nine volumes containing close to 2600 pages of bibliographic entries and 6260 pages of author, title, series, subject and ISBN/ISSN indexes.

Our founding mothers set the bar at a pretty high level for the generations of National Library bibliographers who were to follow. How did we measure up? We had an opportunity to assess our progress a few years ago at the time of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services (ICNBS) held in Copenhagen in November 1998. Representatives from over 70 countries met to discuss and debate issues related to the content and distribution of

national bibliographies. The objective of the conference was to review, affirm and, if necessary, update the recommendations of the International Congress on National Bibliographies held in Paris in 1977. The need for the Copenhagen meeting was prompted by changes in the bibliographic landscape brought about in the 1990s by the appearance of electronic publications and the impact of new communication technologies on the distribution of bibliographic data.

The 23 final recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services are grouped under a number of broad headings: coverage, presentation and timeliness of the national bibliography, legal deposit, the use of international standards.

The Conference recommended that states examine deposit legislation and consider its provisions in relation to present and future requirements. Where necessary, existing legislation should be revised. I'm pleased to say the National Library of Canada has had an ongoing commitment to fulfilling this requirement. Since its creation in 1953, the National Library Act has been revised a number of times, each expanding the scope of what is collected under legal deposit and subsequently listed in the national bibliography. The original legislation, which applied primarily to books, was extended to include serial publications in 1965, sound recordings in 1969, multi-media kits in 1978, microforms in 1988, CD-ROMs and video-recordings in 1993, and electronic publications on all types of physical formats in 1995. NLC staff members are currently working on revisions to both the Act and the Book Deposit Regulations to accommodate the legal deposit of Internet publications. We are, at the same time, addressing the issue of wording that is broad enough to encompass present and future formats by revising the definition of "book" as used in the Act and the Regulations.

Another ICNBS recommendation states legal deposit legislation should consider the possibility of sharing responsibility for deposit among more than one national institution. This possibility is being proposed in the revision process just mentioned; if implemented, the clause will give Canada's National Librarian the authority to designate "national collection" status on other institutions. Indeed, we've already initiated exploratory action on this front with such institutions as the National Archives of Canada and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. To some extent, a designated national collection is simply the logical extension of what we've been doing for years – the Library's collaboration with the National Archives, the National Film Board and the Cinémathèque québécoise to compile and publish *Film-Video Canadiana* comes quickly to mind.

The ICNBS conference dealt at length with the need for international standards in bibliographic work and this is certainly one area where the National Library of Canada has long played an active role and continues to demonstrate its support. Canadiana's first editor played an active role in the 1950 UNESCO Conference on the Improvement of Bibliographic Services. Dr. Lunn later participated in the development of the 1967 edition of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules as a member of the Canadian Library Association Special Committee on Revision of the A.L.A. Catalog code and, at the time of her retirement in 1975, chaired the Canadian Committee on Cataloguing that was engaged in revising the rules. Present staff members continue the National Library of Canada's work in this area. NLC is a member of the Joint Steering Committee for the revision of AACR; we co-developed MARC 21 with the Library of Congress; we're a corresponding member of the Permanent UNIMARC Committee; we participate in the

work of ISO 46 and hold the secretariat of SC 9. An important recent activity has been the harmonization of ISSN rules, ASCR and ISBD(S) under the leadership of the ISBD(S) Working Group chair. I think Dr. Lunn and her colleagues would be proud of what present day staff members are doing to follow up on their pioneering work.

There's nothing like a recitation of library acronyms to cause eyes to glaze over, even in a gathering such as this. Let me wrap up then by concluding with summary comments on *Canadiana*'s accomplishments and a few remarks on the challenges we face at this stage of our development.

Canada's national bibliography made an impressive debut fifty years ago: its coverage was extensive, its currency was remarkable. *Canadiana* has undergone many changes in its relatively short lifetime. It first flourished as a paper product. A microfiche edition later augmented access to entries by a complex series of indexes which served as key to the registry of records. The suite of services offered also extended to include the distribution of machine-readable records as the National Library and the library community it serves automated bibliographic processing in the 1970s. The scope of the bibliography's coverage continued to expand as changes in the country's legal deposit legislation brought publications in many new formats into the National Library. The extent of the detail in the bibliographic entries has expanded and compressed over the years, often in direct relation to increases or cuts in the Library's salary budget and the size of workload to process. *Canadiana*'s editors have endeavoured to expand bibliographic control to the nation's published heritage of all formats by integrating the expertise of partner organizations with the resources of the National Library, by ensuring parallel bibliographical control activities and/or by merging results into one database or product. Recent examples of this cooperative approach include the development of the AMICUS database and the *Canadiana* CD-ROM.

Canadiana has become the flagship publication of Canadian bibliography but it does not go unchallenged in the "indispensable or redundant" debate under consideration today. A recent redesign of the National Library Web site resulted in the removal of any reference to the national bibliography on the home page. The reason given? No place for "dense lists" on a site attempting to appeal to youth and the general public.

Ever the optimist, I am not put off by this development. *Canadiana* has flourished over the years because its editors have been flexible, ready to adapt as appropriate to set backs and/or new opportunities. The basics of our national bibliography have remained constant over the years. As a record of the country's publishing output, *Canadiana* attempts to be comprehensive. As a selection, cataloguing and reference tool for librarians and the book trade, it strives to ensure currency and offer many access points. As the National Library's contribution to the national and international sharing of bibliographic data, it has a long-standing commitment to developing and promoting the use of standards. What has changed is, for the most part, simply the means of disseminating bibliographic data and the format of presenting the data. The paper, microfiche and tape services of our early and middle years have been largely replaced by online access, CD-ROMs and FTP transmission.

Please note, I say "largely" because one of our hottest products these days is *Forthcoming Books*, a listing of titles processed through the Canadian CIP (Cataloguing in Publication) program. In

many ways, this seemingly retrograde product is an odd thing to bring up when talking about the challenges of the electronic era. It's printed on the cheapest form of paper available, it is not indexed and it doesn't cumulate. But let me assure you, if there's a delay in the production of any given month's issue, we hear from our users. Why? Because *Forthcoming Books* gets authoritative data about new publications to potential users quickly – in short, it does what a national bibliographic agency is supposed to do. Each month, it reaffirms itself as being indispensable to its users.

The "dense list" criticism is basically a perception issue and I suspect the critics will change their opinion when they see the changes that are being introduced over the next few months, changes that align our traditional bibliographic work more closely with what online booksellers are doing to promote new books. We will continue meeting our users' bibliographic needs as long as we are prepared to reinvent ourselves, discarding or otherwise changing what is not important and building on known strengths. *Forthcoming Books* and the *Canadiana* CD-ROM will undoubtedly be replaced before long by other means of getting Canadian cataloguing data to the people who need the information.

I am confident in the future of Canada's national bibliography and I hope you will invite me back again when we celebrate *Canadiana*'s centennial.